

## Alive again by Gazyrlezon

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**Summary:**

Will breathed in, deep. He smelt the sweet, untainted smell of the forests, of the bark on the trees and the needles on the few evergreens that grew in the woods around Hawkins. Even the slight smell of corruption and decay which mixed itself into that felt right and almost refreshing.

If it hadn't been so cold he might've taken his shoes and socks off, just to see if he could possibly feel any more connected to this world around him. Any more *real*. He already had a headache of it, but he wanted *more*. He'd read that drug addicts could barely help themselves but to search for more of whatever demon they were addicted to; Will thought he knew how they felt, now.

## Alive again

The needles and leaves which still covered the ground even in early December crunched under his steps, and suddenly Will felt all too alive. So sharp was the sensation of being here, right *here*, and now, just in the *now* that it came close to simply overwhelming him. It almost hurt, the way an icy-cold splash of water on your face hurts in the morning. A clean cut through all other thoughts, and a clear reminder of what was real and what was not.

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Except he wasn't lusting for any drug, just for the feeling of being *there*.

It was a crisp, cold December morning. No snow yet, but here and there the dew on the plants had frozen. He wanted to just stop walking and stare at it all forever, until this picture of perfection would burn itself into his mind, strong enough to dilute and wash away the other images which were still there, of a forest much like this and yet so completely its opposite.

He was euphoric. He wanted to find a pen and crayons and draw it all, just to draw the trees and the bushes beneath them, the way the light broke itself in the now-empty canopy and put everything into a sharp relief. He wanted to paint the way the moss crept upwards along the bark of the trees, and how the ground was still covered in leaves even in the middle of December. And sure, they might be a muddy brown by now, but Will found he didn't care about that at all.

He took another breath, eagerly sucking the air in. Almost greedily, but then, it was a beautiful morning. It was, he thought, the sort of morning you might write a poem about (or might draw, if you had crayons). He almost wished for Jonathan's camera, just to preserve the view.

Walking along further, it almost surprised him when he realized that this was the first time in a little over a year that he'd been here like this, alone in the woods. He hadn't felt any point in going out to Castle Byers, not after what had happened. He'd had enough memories of his little shed dripping in some monster's spit while thick moisture let the wood rot away, all dipped into an eternal sort of twilight even without actually visiting the place.

Except now that he was here again he felt *great*.

It was exhausting, sure, and he also slowly felt his fingers freeze. But ever since Halloween he'd been *terrified* of anything that was colder than he felt when he was in his own room, hidden underneath a thick blanket. But now, somehow, he felt himself rejoicing at it. Oh, it'd frightened him at first when he'd walked out the door. Had his mum Jonathan not been down in Indianapolis for the day he probably wouldn't have gone out at all, but like this he simply hadn't had a choice.

Well, he probably could've just called Hopper. The Chief would've picked him up, certainly. In fact, he'd been sitting in alone on the couch for almost half an hour before he went out, thinking it over, turning his mind this way and that and trying to figure out if he should just pick up the phone. Except phones held memories. And ... well, what if Hopper *did* say no? Rationally, Will knew Hopper wouldn't, that this was just some dumb excuse his brain had made up, but he'd found that even knowing this he still had an unexplainable dread in him whenever he thought of calling the man. So in the end he'd just stepped outside and walked down the road.

It had only occurred to him later that he had, at best, only a very rough idea of where the cabin was. He'd been there, once (*twice*); but when Jonathan had driven him over to see El he had not paid much attention to the road. No, actually, that wasn't quite true; he'd once stumbled on the thing years ago, together with Mike, when they'd

spent the afternoon in Castle Byers and then decided to just see what else stood around in the forest. But it had been abandoned then, and they hadn't known who even *owned* the thing. He remembered Mike saying that it was probably just some old hut left over from earlier days, maybe even all the way back to the first settlers and all that, the lone house of a few daring Europeans out in the endless wild. Certainly not something anyone'd use any time soon. And though Will had doubted that the thing was older than two centuries, he had to admit that it also wasn't hard to believe, seeing how it'd been overgrown by moss, how a hundred nets spun by a hundred spiders had hung from the wooden beams. He could've easily believed that it'd once been some medieval witch's house, except that they were kind of on the wrong continent for that.

Then the next weekend, Mike had actually done a campaign about an old abandoned witch-house. Walking along further and almost stumbling over an old fallen branch which'd been half-hidden beneath earth and dead leaves, Will suddenly realized he was smiling at the memory of that.

In any case, he figured he had a rough idea to work with. And once he'd been out his house, he'd found it hard to turn back in any case. It sounded silly and weird, even to him, but Will found himself intoxicated by it all, addicted to the smell of slightly-decayed leaves in winter, irrationally drawn to the feeling of cold air on his skin.

Life, he found, had a strange way of keeping him in its grasp.

He walked along further, wondering if he'd been past this particular tree already. He thought he had some rough idea of where he was, or at least he told himself he had. Well, maybe he'd get lost. It'd be funny, really; a year ago that'd been the cover story.

He went on further. He was sure he'd find it. Eventually.

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Jim was almost asleep when he suddenly heard a gunshot going off, and then he was as alive as he'd ever been. *Oh no, shit shit shit ...*

The Chief of police, veteran of 'Nam was up from the couch in a second, his customary free-afternoon-nap already forgotten. He almost fell over the coffee table, and then *did* fall over the TV cable, which currently led from the antenna over the floor and into El's room, where she was probably either watching MTV or talking to Mike with it.

He managed to catch himself just barely before he'd have fully crashed face-first onto the floor. Meanwhile the door to El's rooms had flown open by itself, and El came out of it like a dragon under siege attempting a breakout. He picked himself up, ran the final few steps to the front door and threw it open.

His hopes of it just being a deer or some other unwitting animal who'd tripped the wire by chance were crushed in an instant. The figure standing there was quite definitely human.

"Hey! Whoever you are, arms up, let any weapons fall down —"

It was hard to see the figure clearly. Sunset came early in December, and much too early for his liking. Whoever it was, for a moment he stood still, then rushed to bring his hands up.

"Yeah, that's good; okay, now just remember that I'm the one with the gun and then — ahm" He'd been about to say *we can talk about what you're doing here*, when he noticed that he did not, in fact, had a gun on him right now. The hand he'd confidently sent down to the holster at his belt to back up his threat had just reported grabbing into empty space.

For a moment he stood in the frame of the door and felt rather stupid. Of course he didn't have the gun on him, he wasn't on duty this afternoon. That'd been the whole point of the attempted afternoon-nap. And what sense would an afternoon-nap have when you had a gun on you? That'd just taken the relaxing part right out of it.

So he didn't have one. Jim stopped, thought things over for a

moment, and finally *did* shout “and then we’ll talk about why you’re here,” all while discreetly (or so he hoped) turning his head to look at the few rough hooks he’d nailed next to the door. Sure enough, there was his coat, there was El’s coat, and then, a few inches away and above so no one’d knock it off by accident, was his gun. He fidgeted for a moment, and hoped that whoever stood there hadn’t yet noticed anything. He dimly realized that the gun was just out of reach. To grab it, he’d have to give up the door for a moment, and —

El shoved him away and walked past him out into the slowly darkening twilight. Shoved him rather roughly; Hopper almost suspected she’d used some mind-powers to help. And now she was outside there, together with whoever it was who’d found their little cabin in the woods.

*Shit!*

At least he could grab the gun now. He took it, and then stormed outside after his not-quite-daughter.

“Hands up, or —” he stopped short when he finally noticed who it was who had sent off the tripwire.

El turned away from Will to look at him. She didn’t loose a single word, but she didn’t need to, either. Even without her giving that face he knew he’d just fucked up, big time.

Funny enough though, El’s look was less one of terror or outrage or anything that’d indicate he’d just threatened a friend of hers with a gun. It was more a sort of a annoyance, a sort of *Dad-you’re-being-horribly-embarrassing-you-know-that* look. He wondered for a moment if that should disturb him, before deciding he had other problems.

Meanwhile, El took Will’s hand and dragged him inside.

“You’re freezing,” he could hear her say as she walked past.

“I know,” was Will’s answer.

Jim thought the kid sounded entirely too happy about being frozen. Then he, too, went back inside, and put the gun back onto its hook. His aimless wonderings about what he might say to apologize for

having a gun pointed at the kid were cut short when he noticed that El had closed the door on him. And the way he knew her, she wouldn't exactly be thankful if he went in there right now.

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"I'm sorry," El told him after she'd closed the door.

Will stood still for a moment, evidently perplexed (new word! She'd only just learned that yesterday, and was already using it!). He looked at her, his face a pure image of confusion that couldn't have been stronger in any of the TV-shows she so liked to watch.

El walked past him and sat down on her bed. Obviously thankful for a sign of what to do, Will sat next to her. Then finally he asked the question that'd been on his mind the entire time.

"Sorry for what?"

She stared at him, dumbfounded. A rush of bad memories engulfed her for just a seconds, a wave of fears that maybe Will hadn't made it out so unscathed after all. "Hopper?" she asked, hoping beyond hope that at least now he'd get it. Ending up on the shooting end of a gun, El thought, wasn't normally a thing quickly forgotten, but since he apparently really didn't have any idea what she was talking about ...

His face cleared for a moment, then regressed (another new word! Half a week, and already deeply ingrained in her vocabulary!) back to its state of bafflement.

"That wasn't you," he stated, as if that were obvious. Which, well, it was; El had to admit that it wasn't exactly her fault that Hopper had panicked.

In fact, had she had time to consider it all, she'd probably have thought that actually, panicking at the wire going of was a perfectly acceptable reaction. But still, she felt the need to apologize. Will had it hard enough even without someone waving guns at him.

For a moment she thought about giving an answer, and yet the best she could come up with was “Yeah, but ...”

She felt almost ashamed saying something so ... inconsequential. So ... *un-sentency*. Then again, Mike had said similarly incomplete things to her all the time, so she had to conclude that it was probably quite a normal thing to do. Still, she wanted to do *better* than that. After all, every sentence not complete was a chance for practice lost forever, and El knew she needed practice. No matter all the excitement about all the new words which she’d learned; she was still miles away from being as good at talking as her friends were, and she wanted to catch up as fast as possible. That felt too much like letting *Papa* win; she didn’t want to admit that the thirteen years he’d stolen from her made any difference. Even though she couldn’t talk as well as the others.

Will, however, didn’t seem to care. That was probably why she liked him. Dustin and Lucas, or even Hopper, never could suppress the urge to correct her, to rectify a word used in a wrong context or in a wrong place, a wrong past tense here or a skewed-up word order here. And she was thankful for that, too; there was little sense in learning, after all, if there was no one to point out the errors she’d made. But it was nice to *not* do that for a few moments, too. To just talk, and pretend for a moment that none of it all mattered.

And with Will she could; he was a little like Mike in that regard.

*(She’d never considered, or would indeed never believe in the idea, that it was the same the other way round; that Will found comfort in her presence because she didn’t make questions asking if he was well — from her view, after all, Will was well. But had she known, she might’ve thought they made nice set of complements)*

“Doesn’t really matter,” Will told her. “I mean, I got scared, but ... it’s important to keep this cabin safe, too. And ... and I’ve been through worse, too.”

El suddenly felt the intense need to lay an arm around him and hug him; she didn’t know why, and was entirely unsure on whether or not she should do that. Mike hadn’t been very clear on that part, but apparently people didn’t just randomly hug each other when they felt

like it. To the best of El's understanding, there was a complicated set of rules around what situations allowed for what behavior, and getting to the bottom of it all was *hard*, as if there was an invulnerable bulwark of confusion around it (and it didn't help that Mike was always stammering his way through her questions, because answering *any* sort of question about these rules was apparently forbidden by these very rules themselves, which only served to make the whole matter a lot more confusing than it already was).

She did it, though. Worst that could happen, El figured, was that Will'd think her a little weird or out of touch for not getting the gist of those rules yet, but he was the sort of person who'd understand her on that.

And when she finally *did* lay her arm around his back he leaned into it a little, comforted.

*Ah*, she thought. Evidently, in this particular situations it *was* acceptable. She'd have to remember that.

"Well, maybe I should've told you about the wire-traps, when you were here before," she told him.

He gave a half-chuckle. "I think Hopper did, actually. I'd just forgotten it."

Amazingly, he smiled at that. She did, too.

Silence lay over them for a while, with them just sitting there in a quiet sort of companionship that most outsiders would've had a hard time trying to comprehend.

Finally, El started to talk again. "Why did you walk here, anyways?" She hoped very much that he knew it wasn't a demand, or even a belittlement, but it seemed she needn't have worried; he did. Of course he did. He was a bit like Mike in that way; he had a way of understanding, *truly* understanding her, in a way that most others simply hadn't.

"I dunno. I was alone, and ... and I think I wanted to go outside again. I haven't done that since ..."

El gave him a slight nudge, just so he'd know he didn't have to actually finish that sentence. She might not like unfinished trunk sentences, but for things like that El felt rules shouldn't matter.

He stopped again, and she could almost hear him letting a breath of apprehension streaming out of his lungs. A day was always a better day when no had to actually say the name of *that place* out loud. Better yet if no one was even thinking about it, but that, she'd learned by now, was almost impossible, a distant utopia that they all aspired to.

*Walking outside, through the woods.* She thought of how she'd run away, to her sister, yes, and to her Mama. But first it'd just been a matter of stepping outside at all; of leaving the narrow confinements of their little cabin and walking free into the forest outside the door.

"I understand," she told him, thinking of how it'd smelled outside, of the freedom of movement that the wood had seemed to promise.

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It took a little while before he added, almost ashamed of himself, "And I think I was a bit afraid of calling the Chief, you know, so he'd pick me up."

El laughed at that, but not in cruel way. She much understood that too, and it felt good not to be alone in that regard. Hopper was kind, yes, but he *did* look intimidating when you hadn't got to know him well. And it took time, really, truly getting to know him. She'd needed almost a year.

"Just tell him you've got a VHS of *The Bold and the Beautiful*. He loves those."

And then Will was laughing, too.